

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: We'll begin with Governor Thomas and
2 we'd also like to thank you publicly for the generous hospitality
3 you're extending to the Indian Gaming Sub-Committee tomorrow. I
4 know that they look forward to that visit. Governor.

5 GOVERNOR THOMAS: Thank you Madam Chair. It's an
6 honor and a pleasure to appear before you and offer you some
7 education, I guess, and I'm going to start first off by painting
8 a broad picture for you on where we had been, where we are now,
9 and where we are going.

10 I'm the Governor of the Gila Indian River Indian
11 Community which is just about I'd say maybe five minutes away
12 from when you cross our borders. We are the fourth largest
13 Indian populated reservation in Arizona. We currently have an
14 unofficial role of 19,000 members of which 13,000 live on the
15 reservation itself.

16 I'm going to go back a little bit in time to tell you
17 the history of our tribe. And it's going to be very short
18 because I couldn't have enough time to tell you the whole story.
19 But some of our finds on the reservation or archeological digs
20 have produced evidence that our ancestors have been there for
21 10,000 years.

22 The explorers came through in the 1400's and the
23 1500's, among them Padre Kino, some of the explorers, the 49's
24 the Mormon Battalion. All these settlers heading to the west in
25 search of gold et cetera, the discovery of this land.

26 What they saw there were our ancestors thriving
27 because of a running river known as the Gila River. They had
28 such a sophisticated culture that it was unbelievable and it's

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1 been recorded and it's now in the archives in Mexico City and
2 also in Rome because some of the missionaries that came through
3 there recorded history. There was no theory, there was no
4 jealousy, there was no greed, it was a utopia.
5 And so this is where we evolved from.

6 And when the settlement of the west came along and
7 actually took our land, 4.5 million acres, which encompasses the
8 whole city of Phoenix, Tempe, Mesa, Chandler, the metropolitan
9 area, and we were told that we could no longer roam these areas
10 we were going to be confined to 372,000 acres.

11 Along with those settlements came the depletion of
12 our water to the east and we went into sheer poverty. Today I
13 was told that there is written documentation where my people
14 literally starved to death in the desert under trees, their
15 children, because of what had occurred to us.

16 So I will move onto where are today. Whatever our
17 God has left us we have made use of. The river itself even
18 though it's not running -- not having any water run through it
19 has provided us with the sand and gravel operation which we share
20 with the cities surrounding us. In the form of concrete,
21 aggregate or whatever that is needed for building this city.

22 We have also provided, although they took it under
23 different circumstances, the water from beneath our reservation.
24 The surrounding cities have put in invisible straws to draw away
25 our water which we still hope will last us a hundred years and if
26 we're very conservative maybe 150.

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1 So these are now some of the issues that we're facing
2 today. We're going after a water settlement for economic
3 development reasons.

4 We have been struggling with the handouts by the
5 federal government for hundreds of years -- well, not hundreds,
6 but maybe fifty years. Even though we gave up our lives for this
7 country for the freedom and the opportunity that we hope to seek
8 giving our lives in military service.

9 Ira Hamilton Hayes, one of the Indians that was in
10 the Mount Surabachi flag raising is from Gila River. The first
11 casualty in World War I was a community member from Gila River
12 named Matthew B. Juan, we honor those.

13 And it's ironic that we did not get recognized as
14 citizens of this country which we inhabited for thousands of
15 years until the 1920's. We weren't even allowed to vote until
16 1948. So this is the 50th year of our right to vote as Arizona
17 Indians. And we had to fight for that privilege.

18 We go now into other economic areas and we looked at
19 casinos. It took us a long time to make that decision. When we
20 did finally come to it we started out very small, we were not
21 greedy. And through our own efforts we manage, we own, we
22 operate, we regulate our own casinos this has been a learning
23 process.

24 But I will tell you as a tribal leader I have never
25 worked with such dedicated and proud people as the Pima Tribe.

26 Right now we are on the verge of expanding our
27 economic development, but we have to keep our families in tact.
28 So our gaming operations are a little bit difficult to get to for

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1 some -- for most of the reservation except for the west end. We
2 have two in operation.

3 We looked to the banks to support our economic
4 development ventures, but they turned a deaf ear to us. They
5 closed the door on us because we could not provide any way of
6 assuring them they would get their money. One bank, however,
7 Bank One in Arizona, gave us the opportunity. So we borrowed
8 three and a half million and started our operation and within a
9 year we paid that loan off. We pay our debts, that's what we do.

10 Our two casinos have reduced our unemployment rate
11 from 40 percent to 10 percent today. This is the first year
12 we've had a record number of students graduate from college. We
13 had over 25 with varying degrees in various fields. And we have
14 increased our high school enrollment up to 200 percent because of
15 the future they see for themselves, the opportunity, the self
16 esteem. But we keep reminding them remember who you are,
17 remember the people who suffered for you.

18 We are making plans for the future because we don't
19 know how long gaming will be with us. Those are elaborate plans,
20 but we could never plan before unless we had some funding to work
21 with.

22 We're also on the verge of expanding our farming
23 operations from 15,000 acres to 146,000 with use of our water
24 that's available to us. Our right that was taken away centuries
25 ago.

26 The impacts I guess on economic development depends
27 on what your definition is. If you have a version of the

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1 majority of America on what economic development is you may find
2 it different on an Indian reservation, particularly mine.

3 Economic development encompasses houses, it
4 encompasses health care, it encompasses future planning and we
5 are in those areas right now. If gaming does go away we need to
6 be ready in order to sustain what we have established.

7 Right now, I can tell you some of the economic
8 projects that are on going in Gila River. We currently have an
9 industrial park also developed by our own community with our
10 talented people and it's one of the premier industrial parks in
11 the Indian country. We have -- surrounding that we have a huge
12 plan that was just released about two months ago on the northern-
13 boarder lands plan and what we're going to do with the area
14 closest to the metropolitan area.

15 But I will tell you when you go out to the
16 reservation tomorrow and I'm so excited that you are going to
17 come and look at an Indian reservation especially in the
18 Southwest because regional tribes are so unique, but we live out
19 in the desert. You will see no golf courses yet, you will see no
20 baseball fields yet that are green except maybe one. We only
21 have two swimming pools in the area, we're planning more.

22 But you're going to see major highways crisscrossing
23 our reservation because we allow them, we gave them the right-of-
24 way to do this and almost at a steal when you look at I 10 going
25 through the middle of my reservation for 30 miles they gave us
26 the measly sum of \$250,000.00 thirty years ago for that right-of-
27 way and millions of cars literally cross our reservation.

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1 But we have been known to be a people who are sharing
2 and caring and if you look throughout our history you will see
3 that.

4 I heard the problems of gambling. I think my
5 solution is to teach it at a very young age, to teach it in the
6 grade schools. We do not cash payroll checks. We do not cash
7 personal checks. And a ATM was a issue on problem gamblers. On
8 our way to our casino you could stop at any convenience and draw
9 out all the money you want, it's not only drawn out at our
10 casinos.

11 And the impacts of gambling, I guess, will take a
12 long time to figure out and what it's doing to this nation, but
13 we have to start somewhere. And I want to let you know that we
14 are very concerned about what our future is for own people and I
15 hope you will understand what I'm talking about when you come to
16 see us tomorrow. And just kind of take that and place it around
17 the country in the Southwest and you will see what I am talking
18 about. Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you.

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